

BIG BEND NATIONAL PARK
RARE BIRD RECORDS
DECEMBER, 2007 - FEBRUARY, 2008

Attached is a list of observations reported by visitors and staff for the period December, 2007 - February, 2008. I've compiled observations for species which are listed as **Sporadic, Rare, Accidental, Hypothetical** or **Not included** (?) on the park's checklist. A "?win" indicates a species which is documented for the park but not in the winter season.

Winter Season: General Weather Patterns

Last year, the winter season heralded the entry into an exceptional rain year, with all stations reporting at or above average precipitation levels by the end of November, 2007. This year saw a return to the more typical dry winter season pattern, with December and February bringing no measurable rain or snowfall, while January contributed less than an inch over a few days. During the season, several dry and cold fronts passed through the area, dropping temperatures to near or below freezing for extended periods. Over the past decade, only the winter seasons of 1998-99 and 2001-02 registered less rainfall. A comparison of current period (December - February) rainfall with the same time frame in 2007 (+ or -) reveals the dramatic return to drought conditions.

<u>Station</u>	<u>Dec-Feb Precip</u>	<u>Change from '07</u>
Panther Junction	0.30"	-3.18"
Chisos Basin	0.55"	-3.40"
Rio Grande Village	0.08"	-2.81"
Castolon	0.19"	-3.44"
Persimmon Gap	0.46"	-2.27"

Winter Season: The Birds

For the second winter season in a row, not one review species was documented for the reporting period. As always however, there were species of note. The annual Christmas Bird Count at Rio Grande Village on December 29 turned up several surprises: a lone least grebe on the pond at the nature trail was an excellent find, as was a single groove-billed ani at Daniels Ranch. Unlike the grebe which turned out to be a one-day-wonder, the ani wandered between the Hot Springs and the Village for several days before settling into the campground for another couple of weeks. Also unusual for the count was a Bell's vireo, never before documented in the winter months in Big Bend. Reported on the Chisos Count Circle on December 28, but unfortunately not well-documented, were two eastern towhees. Currently this species isn't included on the park check-list, but certainly is in the realm of possibility.

Beyond the Christmas counts, other rarity records were submitted during the period: two ring-billed gulls almost two months and over 50 miles apart were unusual visitors to the area, and a lingering female rufoushummingbird in the Chisos Basin provided a nice contrast to the expected Anna's hummingbirds of winter. Most surprising was an immature female northern parula and a likely western race palm warbler in the Rio Grande Village Campground through mid-January. Both birds appeared shortly after a cold front passage from the west. Even more unexpected was a male Baltimore oriole that was documented twice, the second time by a group of nearly 30 people on a morning bird walk. An accidentally occurring species here at any time, this represents a first winter record. Complementing the Baltimore oriole were two rare reports of winter Scott's orioles just before and just after the new year.

A final note on the annual Christmas Counts speaks to the extreme dry conditions and generally poor food crop conditions. In spite of pleasant weather on both days, the tally for species and individuals was low: Chisos: 54 species and 717 individuals; RGV: 67 species and 887 individuals.

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<u>SPECIES</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>DATE</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>	<u>OBSERVER</u>	<u>PARK STATUS</u>
Redhead	1f	12/22-23	RGV-Nature Trail	Jerry Bartachek	? win
Hooded merganser	2f	02/18	Lajitas	Mark Flippo	acc.
Least grebe	1	12/29	RGV-Nature Trail	Bryan Hale	acc.
Black-crowned Night-heron	1	02/18	Terlingua Creek	Jan Allen	rare
Harris's hawk	1	01/23	Rio Grande-mi 845	John/Joanne Biddick	rare
Merlin	1	01/25	RGV-Group camp	Mark Flippo	rare
	1	02/20	RGV-Daniels Ranch	David Elkowitz	rare
Virginia rail	1	01/02	RGV-Nature Trail	John Biddick	rare
Ring-billed gull	1	12/08	Study Butte	Mark Flippo	acc.
	1	01/20	RGV-group camp	John/Joanne Biddick	acc.
Groove-billed ani	1	12/29	RGV-Daniels Ranch	Mark Flippo	acc.
	1	12/30	Hot Springs	Elsa Matevitch	acc.
	1	01/02	RGV-Daniels Ranch	Kathyrn Rathke	acc.
	1	01/03-14	RGV Camp Site #1	Many observers	acc.
Rufous hummingbird	1f	12/15-1/01	Chisos Basin	Deb Hurst	acc.
Gray flycatcher	1	12/19	Sam Nail Ranch	Paul van Els	rare
	1-2	01/11-13	Rio Grande Vill.	Carl Lundblad	rare
	1	01/11	RGV-rd to Daniels	J&J Biddick	rare
	1	01/16	Cottonwood Camp.	Mark Flippo	rare
	2	02/19	Cottonwood Camp.	Mark Flippo	rare
Ash-throated flycatcher	1	12/20	RGV-Daniels Ranch	Paul van Els	spo.
	1	01/16	Cottonwood Camp.	Mark Flippo	spo.
	1	01/19	Cottonwood Camp.	Carl Lundblad	spo.
White-eyed vireo	1	01/09	RGV-Nature Trail	Ben Weinstein Carl Lundblad	rare.
	1	01/17	RGV Camp- Site #1	J&J Biddick	rare

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Bell's vireo	1	12/29	RGV Camp.	Bryan Hale	? win
Tree swallow	4-5	02/18	Lajitas	Mark Flippo	early
Cave swallow	2-3	02/18	Lajitas	Mark Flippo	acc.
W. scrub-jay	2	12/28	Chisos	CBC	spo.
Red-breasted Nuthatch	1	12/28	Chisos	CBC	spo.
Brown creeper	1	12/29	RGV Campground	CBC	spo.
	2-3	1/10-13	RGV Campground	Carl Lundblad	spo
	1	02/11	RGV Camp-Site#2	E&M Heneghan	spo.
	1	02/14	RGV Camp-Site 12	Mark Flippo	spo.
Carolina wren	2-3	01/08	Santa Elena Cyn	Carl Lundblad	rare
	3-4	01/09	Cottonwood Camp.	Carl Lundblad	rare Golden-
crowned Kinglet	4	12/28	Chisos	CBC	spo
	??	01/07	Lost Mine Trail	Ben Weinstein	spo.
Gray catbird	1	01/11	RGV Camp-Site #22	Carl Lundblad	rare
Sprague's pipit	1	02/18	Terlingua Abajo	Jan Allen	rare
Northern parula	1imm	01/09-18	RGV Camp-Site #1	Carl Lundblad Many observers	rare
	1imm	02/11	RGV Camp-Site #2	E&M Heneghan	rare
Palm warbler *western race	1*	01/11-17	RGV Camp-Site #1	Carl Lundblad Many observers	? win
Red-winged Blackbird	3	12/29	RGV-Nature Trail	Bryan Hale	rare
Baltimore oriole	1m	02/14	RGV-Group camp	Jan Allen	? win
	1m	02/21	RGV-Group camp	Mark Flippo	? win
Scott's oriole	2m,f	12/31	Telephone Canyon	T&C Jarvis	acc
	1imm	01/03	RGV-Daniels Ranch	Mark Flippo	acc.
Cassin's finch	4m,f	02/13	Chisos Basin-Lodge	Mark Flippo	spo.

